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The PALIMPSEST

EMIGRANT-LANDING IN NEW YORK.

Immigrants arriving in bustling New York in 1858

FROM GERMANY TO IOWA IN 1853

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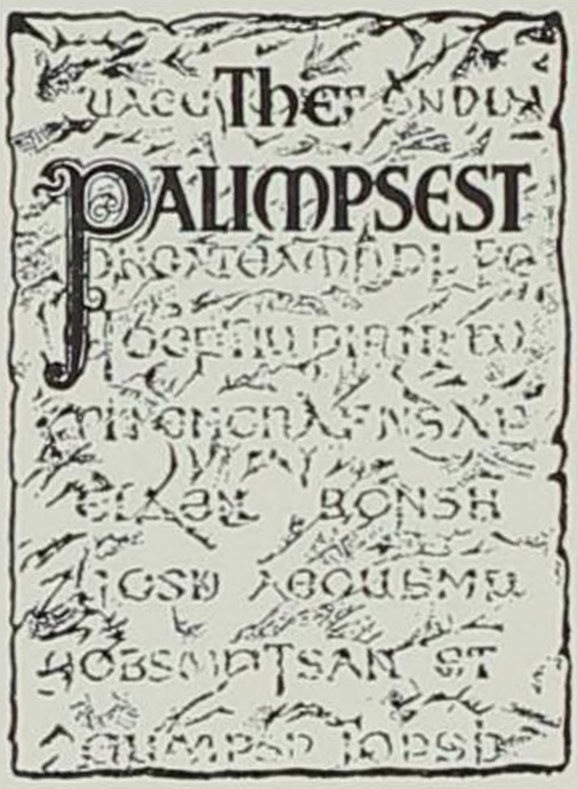

The Meaning of Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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Front — From a sketch in *Harper's Weekly*, II, June 26, 1858, p. 405.

Back — *Inside, Top:* The Lau house near Davenport as it looked in the 1890's. *Middle, l. to r.:* Peter N. Lau, Marie (Suehl) Lau, Charles W. Lau, Elizabeth (Kreiter) Lau. *Bottom:* The Lau house as it looks in the 1950's.

Outside: "New York from Brooklyn Heights," by J. W. Hill, published in 1837. This view shows the busy activity in the port of New York which caused Charlotte von Hein a few years later to declare that it made Hamburg seem "tiny in comparison." This print is in the New York Public Library and is reproduced from John A. Kouwenhoven, *The Columbia Historical Portrait of New York* (New York, 1953), p. 159.

Authors

William J. Petersen is Superintendent of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

Charlotte von Hein was a German immigrant who arrived in the United States in 1853. The account of her ocean crossing has been translated from her original German diary.

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT IOWA CITY IOWA UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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In Search of Freedom

In the decade following the Revolution of 1848 thousands of dissatisfied Germans migrated to America to escape the economic, religious, political, and social oppression of the Fatherland and gain the precious freedom offered them in America. Of the 106,081 foreign-born recorded in Iowa in the Census of 1860, fully one-third (38,555) had come from the following German states:

Austria	2,709	Nassau	210
Bavaria	3,150	Prussia	7,797
Baden	2,701	Wurtemberg	1,581
Hesse	2,017	Unspecified	18,390

It took great courage for these immigrants to forsake their homeland and friends and embark in a small sailing vessel on the long voyage across the storm-tossed Atlantic. Life in the steerage was frequently an unforgettable nightmare; even those more fortunate who traveled first or second class did not soon forget their perilous trip.

The diary of Charlotte von Hein (who, as

Lotte, the girl friend of Marie, the wife of Peter N. Lau, set out from Hamburg aboard the *John Hermann* in 1853 for America) reveals the hardships of a trans-Atlantic crossing by sailing vessel. In the party of eight besides Lotte, were the children of Peter and Marie Lau — Dietrich, the oldest son; Gretchen, the oldest daughter; Fritz, four years old; and Wilhelm, but two years old. Herman, the bachelor brother of Marie, completed the party of Germans from Brunsbüttel, a thriving little town in Holstein near the mouth of the Elbe River.

The Lau family followed close on the heels of Henry Kohrs, who had arrived in Davenport in March, 1853. Lotte came across with the Laus to marry her fiance, Herman von Hertzberg, who had preceded her. Lotte and Herman were married shortly after her arrival in Davenport. They settled in Stockton, Minnesota, a few miles west of Winona, where five children — Adolph, Robert, Ewald, Rudolph, and a baby that died in infancy — were born to their union. When Herman died, Lotte married Peter Boysen, a Winona boat builder, by whom she had six children — two boys who died in infancy, and Cecelia, Charlotte, Oscar, and Anna Matilda Boysen. Lotte's account of the trip across the Atlantic was the common experience of thousands of German immigrants, as well as other foreign groups, who braved the hardships and perils of the arduous ocean voyage

in order to find a new home in Iowa. The third, fourth, and fifth generations of these pioneer immigrants form an important and valuable cross-section of the people of Iowa today.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

From Hamburg to New York

John Hermann, Apr. 3rd, 1853

Finally, at 7 A.M. yesterday, we got started. We steamed down the Elbe, two freight boats pulled by a steamer. About 11:30 we saw our dear Brunsbüttel, and at our request the flag was raised. There were people at the dike and Peter thought he could recognize Mr. Piehl (through his telescope). We sent greetings to you, and we wished you might be informed of them and might see us and be with us in your thoughts. As long as we could see anything of Brunsbüttel we stayed on deck. The water was so quiet that we could not feel the movement of the ship and hence there was no seasickness, but I fear I'll make the beginning to-day, since we are going out to sea, and the boat is beginning to rock. Last night at 6 "the lion" [pilot?] left us, and we had to anchor at Cuxhafen. The doctor and I played chess, the others, cards.

Our Diedrich was quite sick and is so weak now that he can hardly stand. Fritz also was very feverish for several days.

As we left Altona the passengers sang: "Schleswig-Holstein," but the captain made them quit, since we had not yet passed the Danish

"guard-ship" [patrol-boat], and did not want to be stopped by it.

Sat. April 9th. Now we are on the Atlantic Ocean. I don't know, I must not have been rocked much when I was a baby, as I cannot get used to the motion of the waves. To-day for the first time, I feel decent, and am so happy about it that I have sung. Last Sunday was an unpleasant and ridiculous day. At first, naturally, all passengers were on deck, but soon some began to feel miserable, yet did not want to leave the fresh air; but when some of them ran to the railing, — and not just for the purpose of watching the waves — there was laughter all around, and one had to join in the merriment, no matter how miserable one felt. In the afternoon we saw Heligoland. On Wed. the captain saw land again for the first time, also the "Johann Elise," which on Sunday morning nearly wrecked us, was visible in the distance. Thursd. morning we saw a big ship, which came quite close, and we exchanged greetings. It was a passenger ship from Bremen, but we lost sight of it soon. The same day we passed the Shetland Islands and Friday we saw the Summits of the Scotch Highlands. The sun shone on them and we could see the snow. It was unpleasantly cold here, and it even snowed, but not for long. We had strong head winds against us, otherwise we would have gotten into the Atlantic Ocean by Thursday.

Monday, Apr. 25th. If you knew how little one is inclined to do anything, even after the seasickness is over, how difficult it is to write with the boat rocking continually, even to think while noise and commotion is all around, — you would excuse me for neglecting to write a daily report. I have reported our humorous adventures at the beginning of our journey, — now you may also share our sorrows. I ask you to come to the death bed of our little ones. It was last Sat., April 16th, when our little Fritz had to go to bed again, suffering intense abdominal pain. He had very frequent bowel movements. The doctor gave him opium drops and ordered warm bandages. We put them on, although the child screamed and said he could not stand it. Nothing helped; and as the doctor said he did not dare use more opium, and knew of nothing else to do, we were left to our own devices.

In the night of Apr. 18th, our dear little Wilhelm, who had never been sick, not even sea-sick, came down with the same trouble. You can imagine how terrified poor Marie was. We tried various things, i.e., boiled wine with cinnamon, but nothing helped in the least, the sickness only getting worse. The movements were bloody. We kept the children as warm as possible, but everything was in vain. Marie ran from one bed to the other, in utter anguish. Those were terrible days and nights! At such times one learns to pray.

Peter, himself so weak that he could hardly stand, went from one bed to the other to cheer up the children. Sometimes he succeeded for a moment, but never for long. The pain was too severe. Fritz screamed: "I can't stand it!" — and the little one tossed around so that he fell out of the bed once, while always reaching for his mouth, so that we thought his teeth were troubling him.

Friday afternoon little Wilhelm became quiet, and soon I saw to my horror, that his eyes were becoming glassy, & he was unconscious. His last word in the morning had been, "Mama." At 5 o'clock he seemed to be dying, I called Marie and Peter and it was decided to call the doctor again, although not much could be expected of him. We had to try everything possible. Peter gave him the children, to my great chagrin. And what do you think he gave the dying children? Opium! He was very unpleasant to us. We faithfully followed his instructions, although it made us shudder to give the stuff to the children, — Opium & rhubarb, mixed. Wilhelm was in a coma, and we could do everything with him, but Fritz screamed. He suffered terribly. It went that way all day Saturday. The medicine was made stronger. In the evening we got into a conflict with the doctor. He wanted the children's clothes to be changed. Marie did not want to do so; the doctor got angry and said, if she could not do it, he would, and I should help him. I told him I would not do it with-

out the consent of the mother, and he might be assured that we realized the necessity of cleanliness, and would have changed the children before this, but did not feel we ought to trouble a dying child in this way. He said he could not see why we had called him, if we were not willing to obey his orders, he was taking the responsibility. Besides he could not see that the children were dying. So there was nothing he could do. We were glad to let him go. Mrs. Branch came to us and stayed the night. We no longer gave the children the sharp medicine. At last, at 1.10 A.M. the Lord called little Wilhelm home. His mother was asleep, and it was terrible to call her, especially as apparently our Fritz would not live much longer, either. From 3 o'clock that night until 4.15 the next afternoon he suffered terribly, always conscious, knowing father and mother. Those were dark hours and the sorrow of the parents was heartrending. It seems too hard to lose two children in one day. Our sweet little Wilhelm was so cute. Everybody in the cabin loved him and played with him. He could say almost everything and was always talking, and he was so healthy, red cheeks and dark blue eyes, with a mischievous look. Fritz was more serious and quiet, easily hurt in his feelings, but loving his mother passionately, and seldom satisfied with anything that his mother did not make, or give him. He had a very good memory and remembered so many little things

from home. Especially he talked about his Aunt Egge, and he liked to be with his Uncle Piehl so well, that he often asked when we could visit him again so he could play with the children. We told Gretchen in summer they would go to grandma, and she would cook pears and dough, his favorite dessert. The last evening, after I put him to bed, he called me and said: "Auntie, I have not said my prayers." So we said them together. Once I tried to teach him the A.B.C. but did not get far; seasickness interfered.

Peter is still very weak, mostly in bed, while Uncle Herrmann was not seasick at all. Marie, Gretchen, Fritz and I all had it, while nothing troubled Diedrich and Wilhelm. But I got up every day. You don't imagine how unpleasant seasickness is. When you have it, you don't care for anything, everything is nauseating, and you get so weak that you can hardly stand. Peter has been in this condition for 3 weeks, and often he gets the chills so bad, that he cannot get warm all night. The apples we took along helped us most, but they were all too few. Some had been touched by frost, and were spoiled. The Captain is very kind to us. He is very accommodating in every way, does everything possible to make things easier for us. He was very sympathetic at the death of our little ones. Fritz was his pet and he always gave him presents. What I can not understand is the indifferent attitude of Diedrich. He said quietly

to Gretchen: "So we two are alone now;" — while Gretchen shed many tears and often came to the sickbeds. —

Thursday, Apr. 28th. Yesterday we put our little angels to bed. The ship's carpenter made a neat little coffin, and made it water-tight. Into it we laid the little bodies, covered them and poured alcohol over them to preserve them, until we can bury them in New York. In the meantime they are resting in one of the lifeboats. Peter and Marie are bearing their sorrow in quiet resignation to the will of the Lord. Our family circle seems so empty and small now, especially at mealtime, when the two boys always had the biggest appetite, and after the soup, could hardly wait for the next course.

The meals are quite satisfactory. We often have dumplings, pudding, and pancakes. When we left Hamburg, we took a quarter of beef along. So, at first, we had soup and roastbeef every day, and beefsteak for breakfast. Now, for breakfast, we get ham & eggs, sausage, bacon, pancakes, bread or zwieback. At noon potato soup, fruit soup, cured or smoked pork, canned beans, sauerkraut, or diced beets with potatoes as vegetables. Sometimes also pickled meat with dumplings. On Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays pancakes for dessert. Since the fresh meat is gone, we have chicken soup and fried chicken Sundays & Thursdays. For supper, fried pota-

toes, cottage cheese, tea, and sandwiches, meat and cheese. Sometimes also potatoes and spiced herring. Too bad that so often you do not feel like eating some of these things or anything at all.

Monday, May 2. Last Friday the weather was beautiful: warm sunshine and the water like a mirror. I did not think the ocean could ever be so quiet. In the afternoon we saw, some distance from the ship, some so-called porpoises. In the evening the weather changed again and the night was somewhat stormy. Saturday morning the sea was still rough, but quiet again in the afternoon and we saw several hundred of these porpoises, playing in the water; at first they were at a distance but came closer, and finally were all around the ship. All the passengers were on deck and we heard many "Ahs" and "Ohs." For several hours they remained near the ship, then swam away. You probably had your May-fires that evening. We remembered them and talked about you. That afternoon Mr. Tamsen played an April-fool joke on me. He said, "A large steamship's in sight." Of course, I fell for it. But in the evening he had to suffer for it.

We did see two sailing ships, but so far away that it was difficult to distinguish what kind of ships they were. A week ago a brig came so close that the flags were hoisted, and greetings and news would have been exchanged, if a sudden thunderstorm with heavy rain had not made it im-

possible. Then there was heavy fog and we lost the ship again. At present there is a great deal of fog, and we wish we would reach New York soon. The wind is against us so much, and when it is favorable it usually is only for a day. Tell Mr. Dippe that I remembered the prayers he taught me for such occasions, and have used them faithfully.

Ascension Day, May 5th. Yesterday, after a stormy night, it was very cold all day, worse than near Scotland. And since our stove had been moved out we froze, in spite of all wraps we could put on. — Although quite unpleasant sometimes, moving about in stormy weather is often rather laughable. Quite often you land opposite from where you want to go. Sometimes you are thrown halfway across the table. At first, we sometimes crawled on all fours, or tried to slide. In time one learns to walk according to the wind, like the sailors, and by this time we can march around the deck, unaided, even in strong wind. To eat soup is quite a trick. Although everybody holds his plate, sometimes half gets spilled on the tablecloth. To keep the dishes from sliding all over, guard-rails are laid on the table, yet sometimes one gets a portion of meat, bread, etc., on his plate unwanted. When we get clean tablecloths on Sunday, one can hardly tell it on Monday. The days are all alike. There are no divine services on Sunday, — in fact, no difference at all.

May 7th. — There is a little song that I think

of often, which tells the sailor not to trust the sea as it is false and treacherous. We experience that daily. Yesterday, the morning was so warm and sunny that everybody went on deck, walking about or lying around. Marie and I went, too, — and got sunburned, so that our faces are sore today. In the afternoon it suddenly changed, clouds, wind, rain, and very sultry air. We feared a thunderstorm. Since we passed the banks of Newfoundland, where it was so cold, it has been astonishingly warm. We are in the Gulf stream now where the water often is warmer than the air. Last night the wind got stronger and stronger, and it got very dark, and yet I did not like to leave the deck, since there was such a beautiful glow on the sea. It seemed to me as if thousands of little flames or stars were dancing around the ship, sometimes also big blue flames like sulphur, making a bright light close around the ship. In the distance also bright spots could be seen on the ocean, but it was prettiest at the rudder. This night now we had several hours of thunderstorms and very strong wind. For the first time all sails were reefed. I slept through it all until Marie called me with the news that we had favorable wind now and should be in New York in 3 days if it kept up.

When I saw the wild and angry sea for the first time I felt a little afraid, — when the ship suddenly turns on its side so that it looks as if it

might capsize any moment, or again when it raised up and the bowsprit seemed to bury itself in the waves, which threatened to engulf the ship. — But after a while one gets used to it and enjoys the awe-inspiring, yet beautiful spectacle of the roaring waves, beautiful especially when the sun shines upon them. A full description of it I must leave to a more eloquent tongue and a more practiced pen. I am writing only for you, my relatives, and you will excuse me when at times I get things all mixed up. It is hard to collect one's thoughts here.

Tuesday, May 10th. I would advise anyone wishing to emigrate, if at all possible, to travel first class. I find it is comparatively cheaper that way. Everything is taken care of, unless one wants to take along a little fruit, or fruit-juice. Even that can be purchased on board. In second cabin passengers must furnish their own bed clothes, towels, and certain dishes, and they get the same food as steerage passengers. One can get along with that, especially the food as served on *this* ship, but it certainly would not be so tasty, esp. when one is seasick, and so it is necessary to take along all kinds of eatables. Also regarding privacy it is not so good. I would not want to be there (at any price) for any money. We have our cabin to which we can retire and do as we please. Our common living room-(salon) is dry and clean, while in the second cabin water gets in at times.

Also morally there is not the best of order. — We get clean bed clothes and towels once a week. If only the steward were a little cleaner, we'd have nothing to complain.

You already know our companions. Then there is the captain's brother-in-law with his sister. This man, Claus Erdmann, is a plain "nature" man, but so neat and pleasant, we all like him. The sister we do not like so well. *He* goes to New Buffalo, to Horns, Uncle Henning's relations; she will stay in New York as a cook. Mr. Tamsen also will remain in N.Y. His sister lives there, married to a bookseller, and he intends to go into business with him. Mr. Schlenker goes to Indianapolis, the Capital of Indiana, to his uncle, a wealthy soap manufacturer, whose sole heir he is. We are getting to like Mr. Schlenker better all the time. With all his weaknesses, he still is an honest and trustworthy soul. Dr. Gross intends to go to St. Louis. Perhaps I judged him a little too harshly. I still believe that as a physician not very much can be expected of him, but I think that in the illness of our children he acted according to his best knowledge. Yet that does not excuse his behavior towards us, and especially the mother. We are not angry with him, and although he lost much of our esteem, we have tried not to show it. Yet he withdrew from us completely and avoided conversation with us. He stayed outside almost all the time, which puzzled all the passengers. Yesterday, for

the first time, he greeted Peter in a friendly way, so we gather he is thawing out. To our joy, Peter is up and around again, eats breakfast and supper, and is becoming his old self again. Our Gretchen is very jolly; it is hard for her to sit still for 15 mins. She likes to romp around the deck, where she can hold herself up, when all others are falling. Diedrich prefers to sit in the cabin, drawing, or cutting out things, which he does beautifully and naturally. In the second cabin, on Saturday, a young harness-maker from Cottbus celebrated his engagement to a girl from Hamburg. On Sunday was the "Pre-Wedding." To us, the groom appears to be a drunkard. He has sold his watch, boots and overcoat, in order to get money for drinking. However, the bride seems to be a rather irresponsible person, too. The way he talks, it is to be expected that he will desert her in America. The main object of the engagement wedding celebrations was, of course, drinking. Even the captain and the first mate were invited, and they did go in a moment and offered their congratulations. I wrote you before about the fat man in the second cabin. With closer acquaintance, I have lost all interest in him. His name is Baltes, and he proved to be quite the opposite of what we expected. He is evidently the smartest and best educated man in the second cabin, and as such he has a certain power over the others, which he abuses frequently. To ridicule and play tricks on the others is his

chief amusement. At the same time he can act so polite and polished, that one would hardly expect such tricks of him.

At 10 A.M. whisky is distributed; then Marie and I like to be on deck or stand behind the door to watch the "show." — The second mate is the distributor. He is surrounded by a group of men and each of them gets a drink out of a little tin cup, the size of a whisky glass. In windy weather sometimes a wave splashes overboard and some of the men get soaked or even knocked down, while the others roar with laughter.

We also like to watch them getting peas, [pea-soup] at noon. One of 8 men is sent with a kettle and the cook ladles out their portion. If they haven't enough, they may come back for more, — soup, that is, but no more meat. This is difficult business in bad weather, when the ship rolls badly and the deck is so wet that the men are always in danger of falling. And when the waves are splashing overboard, they often spoil the food. Often the people have to pick up potatoes and meat from the deck, and then we feel sorry for them. Then again, the pea or bean soup smells so good that it makes our mouths water.

You, dear Lohmann, have probably let out your cows to-day, on the new grass, and you are looking forward to fresh butter.

You, dear Feils, must be getting very busy too. If only I could get to work again! Work really

makes life sweet. You realize that when you can not work. — And you, my dear Stine, have probably entered upon your new duties. Oh, how I would like to see what you all are doing! We talk of you everyday, and think of you oftener.

Thursday, May 12th. Our English lessons have been discontinued. Everyone studies by himself. Also the crowd is not so jolly as at the beginning of the journey, everyone seems more serious. We had hoped to be in New York at Pentecost and to be able to go to church, but I am afraid we will not make it. We have only 90 miles more to go, but the wind is either still or against us. Then there is almost constantly fog, so that yesterday the captain had to turn the ship in order not to come too close to the shore. When they let down the lead, it showed 300 feet. The other day we saw a number of big swordfish near the ship, who, like whales, blow waterspouts when they come up. Also a pretty mussel we saw going past. The sailors call them "spaniards." We also saw a big turtle, also birds are appearing and ships are getting more numerous.

Sat. May 14th. To-day the weather is beautiful and the wind calm. But it is too bad, being so close to the goal, yet unable to reach it. This morning we were called early to see the beautiful sunrise. I had seen sunsets before on this trip, but not the sunrise. This noon we saw so-called hogfish and this afternoon a large number of small animals in

the water with various beautiful colors. Also moss and seaweed. On land it must be beautifully green by now. I long to see trees and flowers again. According to newspapers which the pilot brought just now, it is very warm there. You should have seen the coming of the pilot boat! Everybody crowded the rails to see what we had not seen for so long: a new man!

You are probably about to retire now, the festival of Pentecost being over, while here the sun is high yet we have set our watches back five hours so far, since we left Hamburg, and it is a queer feeling to think that we can not keep step with you, as far as time is concerned. Marie gets very sleepy at a certain hour in the afternoon. She thinks that is the hour when she used to go to bed; and every night she wakes up at a certain hour.

New York, May 16th. Finally after 44 days, we have reached our goal, with the help of God. Yesterday morning we saw land in the distance, but again the wind was unfavorable, so that we had to tack. I cannot describe our feelings, as we came closer and closer to the shore, and could distinguish trees and shrubs. It was as if we were entering a new life. — Could have hugged strangers. — And you can not imagine the beautiful view as we passed between Staten Island and Long Island. I have never seen anything so beautiful. Even pretty Blankenese is as nothing compared with it; and this view alone makes up for all the sea sick-

ness. I can not describe it. It has to be seen. And the forest of masts in New York harbor! The harbor of Hamburg seems tiny in comparison. Then the various ports of the city are situated so beautifully: Hoboken, Brooklyn, New Jersey, New York, artistically illuminated by the setting sun! Oh, how beautiful! And the many steamships that are constantly going from one side to the other. This one afternoon and evening made up for the six weeks at sea, although we already have had to suffer from the heat, while this morning it still was cold. Peter enjoys it very little, because he is sick.

Wed. May 18th. Yesterday P. Claussen came on board, bringing greetings of his uncle. Some hours later came Mr. Kohlsaat himself with his wife. They wanted to take us to Hoboken where they live, while his office is in New York.

But Peter was too weak and the visit was postponed till to-morrow. Mr. Kohlsaat got the sexton and the doctor to come on board and we had to give a complete report. The little bodies also were inspected. They had kept well. Six witnesses had to confirm the statements by their oaths, and then the gentlemen left. This morning at 8 the hearse came and took Peter and the casket. Marie and I went with Mr. Kohlsaat in his carriage. The cemetery is on Long Island, takes in nearly 300 acres, but will soon be too small. The entire place is like a garden, carefully tended, with very expensive

monuments. Mr. K. showed us one which cost above $2000. He also showed us their own burial place, situated on a slope with a beautiful view. It is called Greenwood, and looks like a tenderly planned green woodland. There is a large burial plot for children only, children of parents who have no lot of their own. There our children were laid to rest. The hearse drives close up to it, and the gravediggers lower the casket. No minister is present. Mrs. Kohlsaat sent Ivy and pinks which we planted on the grave. Mr. K. will put up a little cross. What seemed queer to us were the comical decorations on the children's graves. It is the custom here to put the children's toys on the graves.

Broadway is the main street of New York, more than a German mile in length, and the traffic is terrible. Pedestrians sometimes have to wait a quarter of an hour before they can manage to cross the street. Even wagons have to stop often to avoid getting tangled up with their teams. On account of the terrible heat people prefer to go out in the evening, and since last night I felt like going sightseeing, I coaxed Marie into going along. Having nothing better, I put on my broad-brimmed straw hat. That almost brought the street-urchins on our necks. Women do not wear such things here, while all the men parade in white straw hats. We tried to buy a "broad" hat for Gretchen, but could not get one in any shop. All

the men we passed last night stood still and made fun of my bonnet.

Some women lying in a window laughed out loud. Even laborers loafing along the street, and boys, were not ashamed to make fun of my hat in loud remarks. But when even a horse got frightened by it, Marie had enough, and told me she would never go with me again if I wore that hat. To me it was amusing; and I should think in a free country one should be permitted to dress as she pleases, even if it is strange. — This afternoon Mr. Tamsen and his sister visited us, and invited us to visit them. This evening we took another walk, the whole family, the ship's mate acting as our guide. — All Passengers now have left the ship, except H. Heitmann and J. Lentner, who do not like to travel without Peter. Joh. Peers sends greetings to his brother, and to tell him that he is well, but does not care to write until he has reached his destination. The first two weeks at sea he suffered much, and almost despaired of reaching New York alive. But now he is well again. H. Heitmann and Hans Grill were hardly sick at all, although the latter lost a little weight.

Agents and peddlers are pestiferous here. They even met us in boats before we reached the harbor, and when the captain would not let them come on board, they hung on to the side of the ship and tried to talk to the passengers and distribute their advertisements. After we reached port they

came in droves and "worked" on the people, while making derogatory remarks about each other. Some got "mad" at others, but always made up again. They did not leave the ship as long as anybody was in sight. Nor was I spared, but it amused me. The next morning they were back, before sun-up, — also Jews who wanted to buy old tin dishes, bedding, etc., also peddlers of bread, fruit, and sweets. That made quite a commotion on board. And when it came to unloading the chests and boxes it was terrible. If the owner did not take a very firm stand he lost all control over them and hardly knew what would happen to him. I felt sorry for the poor people. Some had only small packs, yet were imposed upon terribly. And everywhere one is warned against our own countrymen, because they are the worst of the lot.

May 19th. Thundershowers last night with heavy rain, which cooled the air wonderfully. So we decided to make a tour through the city right after breakfast. The Captain told us to see the fishmarket, and it really was worth while. Everything can be bought there for the kitchen, also flowers and refreshments. But you miss much here, if you do not understand English. We were in a store where "they" spoke no German and we no English. There was much laughter as we tried to talk to one another. Peter used what little English he knew, and the owner had to give us some of his answers in writing, as we could make them

out better that way. After half an hour of such conversation we finally came to an understanding.

On the street we met P. Claussen, who went with us to a museum. There we saw that big diamond, the Kohinoor; also a man on horseback with a terrible snake wrapped around him. They were petrified, but quite natural, said to have been excavated somewhere. There were many other things. To Diedrich it was especially amusing. Gretchen could not go along as she had a fever. We stayed too long, and had not noticed that it had begun to rain hard. So our parasols had to serve as umbrellas, and we got badly soiled. There is liberty in everything here, and nobody objects when people throw all kinds of building material on the street while they are building. And since much building is going on, the streets often are very dirty and uneven. But one does not get lost easily, since New York is built quite regularly and all our streets go to Broadway.

The Fair of the Nations is not open yet, but we may go out there sometime and see it at last from the outside. A piece of glass from the London Crystal Palace also was in the museum. None of the other ships from Hamburg has arrived as yet, while ours is busy loading again.

May 20th. We will make the journey to the interior mostly by steamboat. They say it is too strenuous to travel day and night on the railroad, and it is dangerous, too, especially in rainy

weather, as in many places wooden rails are used. Queer thing, the first thing I saw in the paper here was a list of the injured in a trainwreck on the way to Chicago, mostly German names, probably immigrants.

This morning Peter called a German doctor to examine the children. He seems to be a very nice man, and since Gretchen is not well as yet, he gave her medicine, and asked us to postpone our departure until Monday. There are no trains or busses here on Sunday. The doctor says, our little ones died of dysentery. He was very sympathetic.

To-morrow, the 21st, our letters will leave here and should be in Europe after 10 days. We hope to be at the end of our journey, too, by that time. Please write soon, so we know how you are getting along. You, my Stinchen, will doubtless write a long letter. And send the letters without postage, so, if they should get lost, the money would not be lost. Address them to J. J. Kahlke at Davenport where I will call for them. These dollars are neat little coins. They are gold and vary in size according to value. The One Dollar is about the size of the Danish Shilling, which some years ago were introduced, and are so small that they are easily lost. A dollar has 100 cents. The cent looks like our big copper "sechsling." There is very little silver money here, mostly gold or paper. Hard to get change sometimes. 3c. and 10c. pieces and quarter dollars are nice little silver coins, but

all too few. Captain Diekmann says, rather than change a dollar, a saloonkeeper will *give* you a glass of beer. The enclosed leaves I picked on the cemetery. Mail steamers leave for Europe Wed & Sat. Peter and Marie send greetings to be transmitted to the friends in Brunsbüttel. Esp. Christianis, Phiehls, Wurmbs, Schraders, Brünnings & all. Farewell, my dears. More from Iowa. This afternoon we are invited at Kohlsaats. May also send a note with Captain Diekmann. With Love, Yours

Lotte

The Laus in Scott County

When Peter and Marie (Suehl) Lau arrived with their children in Davenport in June, 1853, they found that "Queen City of the West" a bustling Mississippi River port. The town already numbered 4,500, a gain of 1,000 over the previous year. Immigrants, both native and foreign, were arriving daily, those of German ancestry predominating. The Rock Island railroad tracks were being constructed feverishly westward to the Mississippi and the iron horse was destined to slake his thirst in the icy waters of the Mississippi on February 22, 1854.

Meanwhile, ground for the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad was broken at Davenport by Antoine LeClaire on September 1, 1853. No doubt Peter and Marie Lau witnessed this historic event. The intense railroad fever of the time is attested by the fact that the City of Davenport subscribed for $85,000 in bonds to aid in the construction of the M. & M. westward from Davenport to Council Bluffs in 1853. Previously Scott County had subscribed $50,000 to speed the Chicago & Rock Island Railroad to the Mississippi. Other evidences of Davenport's growth during 1853 were the opening of the first music store, the

inauguration of the first express company, the establishment of the first telegraph office, and the conversion of the Davenport *Gazette* from a weekly into a tri-weekly newspaper. Real estate was soaring both in town and country. Even the most sanguine citizen must have gasped when Antoine LeClaire was offered $130,000 for 100 acres of land near Davenport.

Since the Black Hawk Purchase had been open to settlement in 1833, just twenty years before the arrival of Peter Lau and his family, the tremendous stride made in Davenport and Scott County must have astounded them. It must have done much to encourage their faith and belief in a land and a people who had transformed a raw wilderness into a highly productive land flowing with milk and honey. The German element was already playing an important role in this growth and Peter and Marie were thankful they had chosen Scott County as their future home in America.

The average German immigrant or American pioneer was ill-prepared to cope with the inflated land prices that prevailed near flourishing cities prior to the Panic of 1857. If an immigrant wanted to farm and had no money he invariably went to the frontier where he could preempt land at the prevailing price of $1.25 per acre. Frequently, however, he might work in a city long enough to save money with which to purchase a farm or establish himself in a trade. Thus, Henry

Kohrs, who left Holstein at the age of twenty-three, a few months before Peter Lau, had learned the butcher's trade in Germany. Upon his arrival in Davenport, Kohrs worked in a drygoods and grocery store, and then for a clothier, before starting a humble meat market in 1855. It was not until 1874 that Kohrs was able to embark on a small scale in the pork packing business which was later to develop into one of Davenport's flourishing industries.

Peter Lau, fortunately, had gained both experience and wealth while supervising farming on a large estate on the outskirts of Brunsbüttel in his native Holstein. As a result, 33-year-old Peter arrived in Davenport with $8,000 in gold carefully stashed away in his heavy money belt. With his good friend Henry Kohrs to advise him, Peter selected a 160-acre tract of land in Lincoln Township a few miles north of Davenport. It was Kohrs' plan to have Peter Lau furnish him with beef and pork for his meat-market which was soon to become one of Davenport's most popular retail stores.

Leaving his family in Davenport, Peter Lau cleared the land and prepared it for cultivation. At the same time, he commenced building a beautiful home that stood as a monument to his foresight and energy. Much of the lumber was bought from F. Weyerhaeuser of Rock Island, who helped haul it from his new lumber yard out

to Peter Lau's farm. In the field of rafting and lumbering the firm of Weyerhaeuser & Denckman was destined to become familiar to all who dwelt along the banks of the Mississippi.

Lau loved his new home, surrounding it with three acres of lawn interspersed with flowers and ornamental trees. The home became the scene for many picnics and parties for Davenport business men and families. A warm spirit of German *gemütlichkeit* always pervaded these happy social affairs and Peter and Marie Lau were soon widely recognized for their hospitality and gracious charm.

Two children — Charles W. and Elizabeth — were born to Peter and Marie Lau in their new home in Lincoln Township. Charles W. Lau was born on March 26, 1855, and as a boy assisted his father on the farm. When Peter and Marie moved to Davenport in 1881, Charles married Elizabeth Kreiter, a daughter of two German immigrants, Charles and Marie Kreiter of Davenport Township. Peter Lau died in 1884 and Charles continued to develop the family farm, doing much to introduce alfalfa in Scott County, and engaging in general farming. He kept several cows and was deeply interested in butter production. His special hobby was ornamental trees. He frequently had Louis H. Pammel, noted Iowa State College professor, visit his farm to see the progress of such trees as the Magnolias. After

they commenced blooming he called the farm Magnolia Crest, a name that still appears on the large barn that was built on the Lau farm in 1903.

Six children were born to Charles W. and Marie Lau — Alfred H.; Oscar M., the donor of Lotte's diary; Carl S., who continued to operate the family homestead; Elmer H.; Cora M.; and Victor Charles. When Charles W. Lau died in 1925, his third son, Carl S., took charge of the farm and kept the place up. Carl built a stocked lake and lodge on the farm. His son Norman took charge of the farm after World War II, operating it with the finest John Deere equipment. A graduate of Iowa State College, Norman Lau is the great grandchild of Peter and Marie Lau, who crossed the Atlantic in 1853 and selected present-day Magnolia Crest as the homestead for future generations of their children.

The children of Norman Lau — Norman II, Peter, and Susan — represent the fifth generation of the Lau family who have lived at Magnolia Crest. The rich soil on this productive farm still yields the same gracious living to Norman Lau and his family that it afforded Peter and Marie a century ago, striking testimony of the careful farming methods practiced since the ground was first broken by Peter Lau in 1853. This love of the soil, coupled with German frugality and a deep sense of stewardship for its proper care, has been exhibited by German farmers throughout Scott County.

And none have shown a greater appreciation of this stewardship over a century of time than the descendants of Peter and Marie Lau.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN